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EDITORIAL

THE IMP OF THE PERVERSE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WHOEVER has, so far, missed reading Edgar Allan Poe's little story "The Imp of the Perverse" should do so now; thereupon read Gov. Hughes's speech, delivered at the first annual and inaugural banquet of the American Institute of Social Service, held in this city on the 28th of last month at the Waldorf Astoria; and then read again Poe's little masterpiece concerning that perverse peculiarity of human nature, when guilty, to call attention and point to the crime it has committed, and fain would, but impishly cannot conceal.

The Governor of the Empire State, after throwing upon his hosts the usual bouquets that politeness demands in such cases, and complimenting them upon their scheme for establishing a permanent exhibition of life-saving and limb-saving devices, forthwith surrendered to the Imp of the Perverse by adding: "I hope to see established in Albany a Museum of Security exhibiting the safety appliances IN USE." Never was Imp more perverse.

Imagine a collection, gathered in Albany or elsewhere, of the safety appliances "in use" to-day in this State. The collection would look much like an old junk shop, with here and there a vacancy on the shelves for the space that some safety appliance, now in existence but carefully not "in use," would occupy. There would be rotten straps; railings that need propping; bars so near the danger spot that they invite accidents, rather than guard against them, and placed so near the danger spot because "space is more precious than life or limb"; excursion boats' life-preservers that, like those on the *General Slocum*, sink faster than the people who might cling to them, and thereby shorten the agonies of these by hurrying them down to the bottom; girdles that are themselves the sources of greatest danger; balustrades that might as well be away, for all the harm they prevent; nettings,

spread mainly as economic illustrations of the lip-service of devout hypocrites; etc.; etc. Nor would such a collection be complete enough to be thoroughly instructive without a copy of Judge Bartlett's decision non-suiting a working girl who lost an arm by reason of the defective safety appliance in the factory in which she worked, and placing the decision upon the highly philosophic ground of "Obvious Risk"—the risk that the workingman runs when he entrusts his limbs and life to a capitalist establishment being so "obvious" that it is his own fault if he walks in. That decision is one of the most popular safety devices "in use" among the capitalist class—it secures their plunder from being turned, any part of it, into lint and bandages in behalf of the reckless workmen who sportively disregard "obvious risks."

It is to the facts, implied in a collection of the safety appliances in use by the class which he represents, that Gov. Hughes's Imp of the Perverse perversely calls attention.

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